MARTLESHAM MERRIMENT

The Sixteenth "Contractors' Dinner" a Great Success

"OUR job is to test aircraft, not to tell the constructors how to design them." This sentence from the speech made by Group Capt H. G. Smart, O.B.E., D.F.C., A.F.C., the new C.O. of Martlesham, at the sixteenth annual dinner, was greeted with applause. The significance of the remark, and the sly dig contained therein, was not lost on any one of those present.

For the benefit of the more recent additions to our growing family of readers it may be explained that "Martlesham," the official title of which is the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment, is the aerodrome in Suffolk to which all aircraft, military and civil, are sent for their official flight tests. Elaborate timing apparatus is installed there, and the Establishment has won a world-wide reputation for accuracy; if a British aircraft constructor quotes Martlesham figures to a foreign purchaser, the figures are accepted without question.

In 1922 the C.O. and officers of Martlesham decided to give a dinner to representatives of the firms whose products the establishment had tested during the year. The occasion was a great success, and the "Contractors' Dinner," as the event is now called, has become an annual event to which everyone fortunate enough to be invited looks forward with the keenest anticipation. The expression "fortunate enough" is used advisedly, for it is indeed a privilege to be invited to the Martlesham dinners. This is not because the Establishment is parsimonious in its hospitality. Far from it; were it possible to do so, almost the whole of the aircraft industry would be invited. Unfortunately, the accommodation in the mess is strictly limited, and as the representatives of the aircraft firms do not, on an average, grow any thinner with the years, the space problem has become acute. Moreover, the industry is expanding at an alarming rate, and even representatives of "shadow" firms take up room. Hence the feeling of good fortune among those who sit down to the annual spread at Martlesham.

Let it be said at once that this year's "Contractors' Dinner" was one of the most pleasant of the whole series. There was the right sort of congenial atmosphere; the speeches were short and few and of the leg-pulling, light-hearted sort generally associated with family gatherings at which everyone knows everyone else intimately.

Mr. Handley Page voiced the feeling of all when he referred to the new C.O. as "our old friend Reggie Smart." (Group Capt. Smart's initial are H. G., and it is always a good sign when a nickname is affectionately bestowed upon a man in a responsible position.) He knew him when he commanded No. 99 Squadron, and, possibly, recollected the period when, in the days of the Heyfords, people were wont to walk up to H. P. and whisper "Say ninety-nine."

Air Commodore Gill, Mr. Handley Page said, had lit a fire at Martlesham which had never been put out, and all the guests were pleased to be among people who *flew*. He said this without offence to another establishment situated to the south-west of London!

The practice of "ordering off the drawing-board" has placed a great responsibility on Martlesham, but the establishment was equal to the task. Of course, he added, sometimes Martlesham held erroneous views!

Mr. Handley Page concluded his remarks by paying a very sincere tribute to Mr. Fairey, who had not received the credit which was his due for introducing the low-drag aeroplane. He did good work when he introduced the Fairey Fox many years ago.

Mr. C. R. Fairey said he might equal Mr. Handley Page in voluminousness, but could not hope to equal him in wit. Mr. Handley Page drew on the scriptures whereas he (Mr. Fairey) had to resort to *Razzle*. He was grateful to Mr. Handley Page for the reference to the Fox, but H. P. had actually done very much more than he for British aviation. Kind words were rare these days, and aircraft constructors had in turn been called pioneers, profiteers and prophets of death. He concluded by paying a tribute to the work of the Establishment and said the word Martlesham represented a standard of excellence throughout the world.

The rest of the evening was spent in "talking shop," and although the atmosphere was one of universal geniality there was none of that horseplay which has marred the perfection of certain other Martlesham evenings. It was quite obvious that in Group Capt. Smart the aircraft industry has a very good friend as well as a stern but scrupulously fair judge of its products.

THE U.L.A.S. DINES

ALTHOUGH the annual dinner held last week was only its second, there is no doubt that the comparatively newly formed University of London Air Squadron has already developed that spirit of hospitality and comradeship on social occasions for which the two older Squadrons are noted. This fact, together with an excellent dinner and speeches of the highest order, assured a thoroughly enjoyable evening for everybody.

As is the custom at University Squadron dinners, the chief instructor, Wing Cdr. T. F. W. Thompson, proposing The Guests, talked chiefly about the Squadron, though he first welcomed Air Vice-Marshal E. L. Gossage (from Northolt), Air Officer Commanding No. 11 (F.) Group; Wing Cdr. Vincent; and, from the O.U.A.S. and C.U.A.S. Wing Cdrs. Herbert and Lockyer, the chief instructors respectively; and also the adjutants and representatives of those Squadrons.

The London Squadron, he said, had 48 members at camp last year, the limiting number being 50; of these 35 qualified for certificates of proficiency and civilian "A" licences. Twelve members had entered the R.A.F., three short-service commissions being granted last summer, and three further applications had been made.

Replying to the toast, the guest of honour, Lt.-Col. A. J. Muirhead, Under-Secretary of State for Air, stressed the value of members joining the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve on going down and said that he believed that the behaviour and example of members of a Squadron had a great effect in promoting recruiting. He then spoke of his 15,000-mile flight in the Near and Middle East, adding that he hoped that his statements were accurate, or he would certainly hear about it afterwards from his private secretary (Mr. F. R. Howard).

Sir Henry Tizard, who is Rector of the Imperial College of Science and Technology and Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Military Education Committee of the University of London (this committee represents the University Authorities in the administration of the Squadron), said he was delighted to see Group Capt. F. H. M. Maynard, late chief instructor of the Squadron, at the dinner. He went on to discuss the differences between the London Squadron and those of Oxford and Cambridge. In the former case flying was carried out only on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, while in the latter case he believed these two half-days were the only non-flying afternoons. He spoke of the "mixture of ignorance and self-conceit so esteemed in the city" associated with Oxford and Cambridge, where, he said, they had "time in which to contemplate their own souls and perhaps someone else's."

Mr. A. G. Parnall, replying for the University Squadron, thanked the chief instructor and instructors at Northolt and congratulated two for being selected for a second year for the Hendon Display. He wished to make it clear that the Peabody Act had not been inspired by a member of the Squadron. He repeated that no one at camp had lost himself on a cross-country, but one gentleman on a height test had landed at Radlett from Halton, and, on receiving his course back, flew to Abingdon.

Among the distinguished guests were Mr. H. L. Eason, Principal of London University; the Principals of King's and Queen Mary's Colleges; and the Provost of University College.

Jicwood

UNDER the title Jicwood, Ltd., a new company is being formed to develop the controlled impregnation processes of Halila, Ltd., described in *Flight* of October 7, 1937. Directors of the new company are Messrs. Titler and Watts, of the Airscrew Co., Ltd., Weybridge, and Capt. Swann, of Halila, Ltd. The latter will also become a director of the Airscrew Company. The two firms will operate as separate companies but in close co-operation. The works will be transferred to Weybridge from Slough, and the necessary plant installed for manufacturing resinised wood in the form of planks and sheets. Capt. Hubert Broad will continue to act as technical adviser.